

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

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Wednesday, April 1, 2009

House Committee on Great Lakes and the Environment
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs
Senate Hearing Room, 1st Floor, Boji Tower
124 W. Allegan
Lansing, MI 48909

MUCC Testimony on House Bills 4677-78 and Senate Bills 388-89

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to express MUCC's support for this bi-cameral, bi-partisan solution to sustainable funding for Michigan's public recreation gateways – our state parks.

For seventy-two years the sportsmen and women of Michigan United Conservation Clubs have been *Uniting Citizens to Conserve and Protect Michigan's Natural Resources and Outdoor Heritage*. Aside from being active in the outdoors, MUCC members understand that outdoor education and stewardship is the key to keeping Michigan's most treasured asset – our natural resources – available and abundant for future generations.

For many people in Michigan, our state parks, forests, and recreation areas are the first gateways to experience the wonder of Michigan's great out-of-doors. Unfortunately these gateways to recreation are deteriorating due to the lack of state general funds combined with the effects of old age and neglect – shoreline erosion, caved-in roofs, overgrown trails, crumbling boat ramps and roadways, rotting historic buildings, etc.

The legislative proposal brought forth today is a refreshing example of bi-cameral and bi-partisan cooperation to solve one of our state's many challenging problems. But perhaps more importantly, it is also the calculated work-product of Michigan citizens through the Citizen's Committee for Michigan State Parks: sportsmen, academics, state and park officials, local governments, and other citizen resource stewards.

MUCC is grateful for the opportunity to serve as a member of the Citizen's Committee and we're also proud that sportsmen and women have always paid for the conservation that sustains their recreational pursuits. However, just like other users groups that enjoy our state parks, sportsmen and women represent merely a fraction of the annual visitors and users of Michigan's 98 state park facilities. Since the 2004 elimination of general fund support for parks and conservation, recreational access, along with resource and habitat management, has fallen along with the economic condition of our state. As a result, eighteen percent of the funds allocated annually from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to the State Parks Endowment Fund are now needed to in order to keep the gates open instead of funding essential infrastructure repairs and park improvements. In light of the testimony shared today state park officials, it's clear that our parks are in desperate need of a sustainable funding structure. Without one, our state parks will no longer be able to provide access to the quality outdoor experiences we know Michigan has to offer.

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The state park system and the access it provides to sportsmen and other recreational users is also a key economic engine that – if healthy – will continue to produce state revenue and jobs. As members of this joint committee already know, tourism – supported by access through our state parks – is our state's third largest, ever-growing industry. Hunters, anglers, and trappers, who have gained recreational access through state parks since their inception, are a key component of that industry. In fact, sportsmen spend \$3.4 billion annually in the state, supporting roughly 46,000 jobs, \$1.7 billion in salaries, \$378 million in state and local tax revenue, and a \$5.9 billion ripple effect on the state economy.¹ Combined, all travel related expenditures in Michigan in 2004 totaled \$17.2 billion, 72 percent of which came from tourism and outdoor recreation.² This supported roughly 210,000 jobs.³

State parks also provide critical habitat refuges for Michigan's native wildlife and fish. State game and wildlife provide more than 340,000 acres of non-urban habitat and most of this land is found in where 85% of Michigan's population lives, works, and plays. This land is managed to keep quality wildlife habitat while also providing optimal oriented outdoor recreation opportunities, which are rustic, yet adequately accessible for urban communities.

Naturally, today this joint committee is witnessing abundant praise for a proposal that is necessary for the sustainability of the superior recreational access that Michigan state parks provide for. And while critics of this proposal will argue various flaws regarding the \$10 opt-out provision for a license plate "passport" for state parks, MUCC urges the respective committees to report House Bills 4677-78 and Senate Bills 388-89 with consideration of future legal clarification as to purported constitutionality issues. MUCC believes this bi-partisan, bi-cameral legislative proposal is a workable solution that must not be subject to traditional political stop-gates. After all, the legislature should not be hesitant to give citizens a decision as to whether they prefer to participate in an optional, seamless fee structure that sustains Michigan's state parks.

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring future generations may have access to the natural surroundings that enhance our quality of life and contribute to our social and economic prosperity in Michigan.

Sincerely,



Dennis Muchmore
Executive Director

cc:
Bill Krepps, President, MUCC
MUCC Executive Committee
Keith Charters, Chair, Natural Resources Commission
Members of the Natural Resources Commission
Rebecca Humphries, Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

¹ *Sportsmen, The Broader Picture: A Report for Michigan Legislators and Policy Makers*, National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses, 2006.

² 2008-2012 Michigan Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan -

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/SCORP-Executive_Summary_2008-2012-Final_212112_7.pdf

³ 2008-2012 Michigan Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan